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SUBJECT: EMBASSY MINSK'S 2008 WOMAN OF COURAGE NOMINEE

REF: STATE 142614

¶1. (SBU) Embassy Minsk's nominee for the International Woman of Courage Award is Enira Bronitskaya, former political prisoner, human rights advocate, civil society activist, and International Coordinator for the Belarusian NGO Committee for Defense of the Repressed "Salidarnasts." Nominee is willing to be considered for the award and agrees if selected to travel to Washington, DC.

¶2. (SBU) Biographical data as requested in reftel:

- ¶A. Full Name: Enira Viktorovna Bronitskaya
- ¶B. Job Title: International Coordinator, Committee for Defense of the Repressed "Salidarnasc"
- ¶C. Date of Birth: 31 August 1981
- ¶D. Country of Birth: Belarus
- ¶E. Citizenship: Belarusian
- ¶F. Telephone: (375 29) 183-5623
- ¶G. Address: P.O. Box 148, Minsk, Belarus
- ¶H. Email: b\_enriiaa@hotmail.com
- ¶I. Passport Number: MP2032130

¶3. (SBU) In a country where politically-motivated imprisonments and KGB harassment of pro-democracy activists is commonplace, Enira Bronitskaya has been a powerful advocate for victims of political persecution and has been persistent in her efforts to fight injustice in the Belarusian electoral and legal systems. She was jailed twice for her work with the election monitoring NGO "Partnership" which observed several elections in Belarus. Nevertheless, she emerged from imprisonment an even more determined civil rights activist, continuing her work as International Coordinator for the Committee for Defense of the Repressed "Salidarnasts." She leads the group's efforts in assisting political prisoners, defendants charged with political crimes, and students expelled from universities for political reasons. She continues to face ongoing harassment by the authorities for her activism, and was once accused by the KGB of plotting a coup.

From Imprisonment For Seeking Fair Elections...

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¶4. (SBU) Ms. Bronitskaya began her activism as one of the main leaders of the election monitoring NGO "Partnership." Her organization observed several Belarusian elections, including the 2003 local elections, the 2004 Parliamentary elections, and a national referendum allowing the president to stand for a third term. Despite constant harassment from authorities, her monitoring team managed to gather evidence to conclude that the Parliamentary elections and referendum were rigged. "Partnership" published a report of its findings and circulated it in Belarus and throughout the international community.

¶5. (SBU) Subsequent to the elections, authorities banned her organization. Though political activity by its members thus became illegal, Bronitskaya continued to develop and strengthen the organization. She and other leaders of "Partnership" were jailed twice for their persistence, once in 2005, and again for six months

in 2006.

...To Advocating For Political Defendants and Students

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¶6. (SBU) Bronitskaya is currently the International Coordinator for "Salidarnasts", a group that secures legal help for defendants charged with political crimes, exposes injustice in the court system, and assists students expelled from universities for political reasons.

¶7. (SBU) Through persistent pressure on school administrators and other authorities, she has led the organization's effort to fight politically-motivated expulsions from Belarusian universities. Over 100 students have been expelled for their political activities in the past year, but through her efforts, many have been able to find educational opportunities and funding abroad. She works with foreign governments to accept dissident students into universities abroad and advocates for scholarship support. She has also spearheaded the effort to procure legal counsel for defendants accused of political crimes. Such defendants have often had difficulty obtaining assistance from lawyers who are reluctant to get involved in dissident activities. She has successfully persuaded several lawyers to remain on retainer to defend political activists. The result has been that many young dissidents have been able to avoid more severe sentences they surely would have received if unrepresented. She is now spearheading an effort to publicize the names of police officers and officials who provide false evidence in cases against dissidents.

¶8. (SBU) Enira Bronitskaya is a strong example of an ordinary citizen who makes great personal sacrifice -- including imprisonment -- to further democracy and civil rights in her country. High-profile victories against the regime in Belarus have proven difficult to achieve. Bronitskaya has shown that brave individuals can make a difference through a series of smaller victories, helping to prepare Belarus for a future without dictatorship.

¶9. (SBU) Political Officer Stephen Kovacsics is post's point of contact for this nomination. He can be reached via telephone (375 17) 210-1283 or email kovacsicsg2@state.gov.

Stewart